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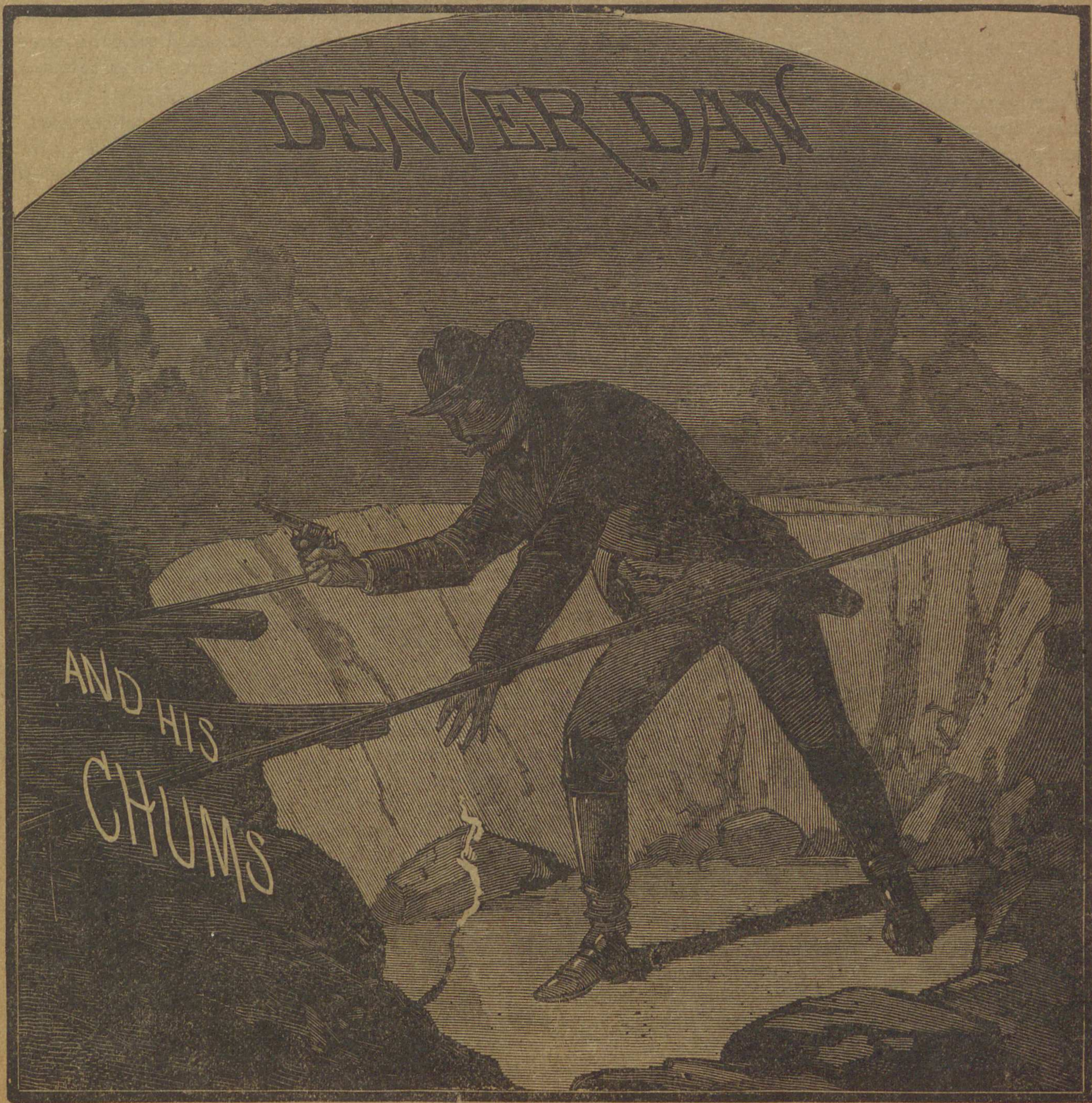
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Vol. II.

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DENVER DAN

AND HIS
CHUMS



Denver Dan and His Chums.

By "NONAME."

Author of "Denver Dan and His Mystic Band," "Denver Dan and the Road Agents," "Denver Dan and the Counterfeiters," "Denver Dan Outwitted," "Denver Dan the Sheriff," "Denver Dan's Peril," "Denver Dan to the Rescue," etc., etc.

CHAPTER I.

OUR HERO AT HOME—OLD FRIENDS AND NEW FACES.

"WELL, boys, I'm home again and ready for work."

These words were uttered in the presence of several determined-looking men by the hero of this story, one Daniel Fleming, sheriff, but better known as Denver Dan, in his office in the city of Denver, Colorado, a flourishing place then, but nothing like the important city it is now.

The men to whom he spoke were known as Joe Darrel, Mike Halcraft, Jerry Dunn, Ralph Martin, and one or two others, are well known to the readers of the stories detailing the previous adventures of the famous vigilants.

"And it's right glad I am to see ye back again among yer old chums," said Halcraft, "and the byes is glad to see ye, I'll wager."

"Dan knows that," said Darrel. "But where is Jack, handsome Jack Travis, and Hal Barstow?"

"Jack will be here soon," said Jerry Dunn, "and so will Hal. Dan has seen Jack."

"And he tells me there is work to be done," remarked Dan, "just as if I hadn't been busy ever since I left you all to go after that highwayman."

Martin had been introduced to the rest, and was enrolled in the Mystic Band, which still existed, though Dan was sheriff and Lynch law had been abolished.

"Now, my men," continued Dan, "we are all chums, all of us, for I hear Jack's step on the stairs, and Hal is with him too," Dan's words being proved correct by the entrance of the two men at that moment.

"We are all chums, I was saying, Jack," resumed the speaker, "and I intend that we shall all engage in this new work together. Sandy Davidson and Harvey Wright are new men, but good, as you'll find, and with all of us working together, I fancy these train robbers will want to quit business."

"Aye, that they will," said Darrel. "Denver Dan and his chums will show 'em something to open their eyes."

"Now listen to me. You are all men of the inner circle and I can trust you. Though we have changed our bases of operations somewhat since our first organizing, we have still a powerful band."

"I want more officers. Jack, as you know, is my only one

at present. I propose this arrangement. I am commander, we will call Jack vice-commander, and I want two men for captains, each of whom will have two lieutenants under him."

"Then, by virtue of my promotion from lieutenant to vice-commander, I claim the privilege and the honor also of nominating Joe Darrel and Mike Halcraft as captains," said Jack, stepping forward.

"I am satisfied," replied Dan. "Are you all agreed?"

"We are."

"As you have been longer in the band, Joe, you are first captain," said Dan. "Will you choose your lieutenants?"

"Have I the right?"

"If all are agreed."

"We are," said they all.

"Then I will have Hal Barstow and young Martin for my lieutenants."

"A good choice; Mike, whom will you have?"

"Captain Halcraft, your Excellency, will take, let us see—aha, I have it; come out here, Jerry Dunn, you're a true Irishman like myself, and I want ye for wan. Whisper now, who'll be the other? Aha! Sandy, my boy, you're more than half Irish, being born in Scotland and reared in Dublin, so I'll have ye."

"That fixes that matter," said Dan. "The men will be divided into sections, so that each captain may know whom he can depend upon, and each lieutenant will always have a certain number of men under his command. In case of an emergency, the reserve force will be apportioned, so many to each lieutenant. For the present, each will have five men upon whom he can always rely."

"Faix we're getting to be quite military," laughed Mike, "'tis a long time since I've heard the iligant whistle of our brave commander soundin' through the hills. The toimes is degineratin' intoirely."

"You will hear it again, never fear, Mike, for these fellows have grown desperate, and imagine they can rob with impunity."

"The chums will quickly undesave them thin, and as a diputy sheriff I shall take the greatest playsure in the

wurruld av popping two or three av them through the head wid my shooter, arrah!"

"You are the same old Mike as when you and the rest of us hunted Colorado Charley and his gang from the neighborhood," said Joe.

"Don't spake av him, Joe, for that makes me think av Texas Jim, and that agin of poor Sam Horton, the best frind I iver had, barrin Dan, maybe. Poor Sam, I only wish he was wid us now, I'd stand aside and let him be captain in me place."

Mike brushed away the tears which the remembrance of his old friend had brought to his eyes, and then Dan's voice was heard saying:

"I will meet you all in the council chamber this evening at nine o'clock."

CHAPTER II.

A MUCH TROUBLED MAN.

THOSE who have followed the fortunes of Denver Dan, will remember the saloon kept by the jolly Dutchman, Tony Flaxman, and known as the Parlor, and to that locality we will now transfer the action of our story.

Poor Tony has been much troubled of late, his efforts to keep a "reshpudable blaces" not being altogether successful, and this night he is troubled more than ever.

First of all a seedy looking man has come in, taken three or four drinks of whisky, and not small drinks by any means, eaten enough of the free lunch to make a good meal, and then, after smoking two ten-cent cigars and monopolizing the only newspaper in the place for half an hour, has coolly departed into the silent night without saying a word about paying his reckoning.

"Vell, I vas blowed!" says Tony in deep astonishment, as the last glimpse of the vanishing coat-tails of the impecunious customer faded from his vision. "Dot bum vas got der sheek off a government mool, so hellup me gracious."

"Do you know him, Tony?" asks Omaha Al, one of the Dutchman's best customers.

"Did I vos knowed him. Vell, I dond was hees name, but I knowed his peesnis. He vos a sucker!"

A roar of laughter followed this sally, but Tony, failing to see the joke, began to get mad.

"So hellup mein soul, I dond see noding to laff at, no, by dunder, I don't. Off ye don't shtop dot tam laugh, I was put all foam und no peer in dose glasses. By Shaky, dot's where I makes me dot brofit in de peesnis."

As if this little episode was not enough to try the good man's patience, some one must needs put a kitten upon the piano strings, and then go to playing a lively tune.

A rare instrument was that piano, the first that had ever been seen in Denver, and of which Tony was justly proud, though it would not have fetched forty dollars in a New York auction room.

When the first few notes of "Die Wacht am Rhein" were struck up, Tony began to smile! and sent his boy Chris into the main room with a glass of beer—plenty of beer and no froth—for the player.

Chris had hardly entered the room, however, before Tony discovered a false note, and a shrill one at that.

The player had got down into the bass when the treble

suddenly came in quite unexpectedly, and made Tony clutch his hair in a rage.

The interpolated notes were not instrumental, but vocal, and it was not the *vox humani* stop that had been started either.

The mixture of sound was something as follows:

Boom, boom, miauw, boom, psst! yeow! boom ps-s-st, boom, mye-oeouw.

"Gott in himmel, vot vos dose!" yelled Tony. "I dinks me dot bianer was gone grazzy. So hellup me, Shaky, vot makes me dot?"

There was an extra bang as the piece concluded and an extra hissing, sputtering, yowling, and spitting as a very small but terribly indignant cat, whose tail was twice the size of its body, came bounding over the music rest, and clattering over the key-board, leaped at the player, who was just taking up his "schooner" to refresh himself.

Man, beer, cat, piano stool and music were rolled into one heterogeneous mass upon that once gorgeous carpet, the pride of Tony's heart, though its white spots were now dark, and its dark spots worn white.

Everything under the sun had been spilled upon that carpet since it was first laid down, from blood to gin, whisky, beer, coffee, tobacco juice and water, though the latter was in a decided minority.

The escaping cat let herself out of the bag, so to speak, and Tony realized at once the meaning of those most remarkable chords introduced into his favorite melody.

"By dose big Roggy Moundins, off I vos droubled any more vid dot foolishness, I vos cut mein troat first und shoot dot man vot do dot aeftervards."

The instrumentalist had by this time recovered himself, and, advancing towards Tony with a mischievous wink, he said:

"How do you like the new arrangement of that fine old melody, Tony? That represents the catas-trophe which will fall upon anyone who tries to bamboozle a Dutchman."

"So hellup mein eyebrow, I dinks you vos tam fool! Mein Gott, mein Gott, vos efer a man droubled like I vos! I used to keep me a respedable blaces, but dem dimes don'd vos been no more."

Tony's troubles were not over yet, however, for later on that evening Missouri Mose and Dakota Dave took it into their heads to have a fight over a game of poker, Omaha Al, who had been playing, declining to take part.

Revolvers were drawn and discharged with great rapidity, but though no one was hurt, Tony's mirrors and stacks of glasses were badly demoralized by the flying bullets, and a portrait of the Emperor William had its right eye knocked out, giving it a very rakish expression.

"By Shaky! did you ever vos saw such a droubled man as I vos?" moaned Tony. But nothing daunted, he sprang between the two combatants, and grabbing them each by one ear, knocked their heads together until they rang again, and enough stars were seen to stock a new universe.

CHAPTER III.

THE TROUBLE SUDDENLY CEASES.

"By dunder, I vas see off I couldn't shtop me some off dose foolishnesses! How you like dot, ugh, und dose, und dis leedle one for five cends?"

Tony banged those two heads together in most vigorous style, accompanying the exercise with the remarks above quoted, sandwiching them, as it were, between the raps.

The two bullies broke away at last and retired, having nothing to say to the irate Flaxman, who was known to be a fighter of considerable reputation, or at least he had been in his day, though now he was almost too fat.

"Off you walks into my parlor says dot spider to dot flea, und behaves yourselluf, dot vas all right; but I told you I vas had me no more droubles. I vas scharge you for dot proken glass, Mr. Davy, und for dot eye wat der Kaiser Wilhelm vas got put owit."

"Charge and be blamed, it wasn't me done it."

"You vas pay halluf and Moses vas pay halluff, and anybody ellus what vas been foolishin' to-nide, vas pay der resht. Dot's fair, don'd it?"

The men muttered something about settling up to-morrow, and then sauntered off into a corner where they continued their game rather more quietly than they had conducted it before the disturbance.

But Tony's troubles were not all over yet, for that evening, although they were destined to come to a summary and final end.

It was nearly twelve o'clock, and the boys and mother Flaxman had long since gone to bed. Tony, beginning to think himself that it was time to shut up for the night, when the troubles broke out in a fresh spot, as Tony himself said in his characteristic way:

Most of the loungers and regular habitues of the place had gone home, and it was well nigh deserted, save for three or four men who had come in late and were drinking together at a table in one corner, near the door of the same room where the piano was.

There were four of these men, and they all looked as though they would be hard customers to deal with if any trouble should ever arise with them.

They were not playing cards, and they had not had more than two drinks apiece, and yet they remained while the time fled, and the hour of midnight was fast approaching.

They were talking, low and earnestly, and the subject of their discussion was evidently an interesting one to keep them so busily occupied, hour after hour.

Tony could not hear what they said, nor any one else, and it would not have been wise for any of that crowd of loungers to have tried to find out what it was that so deeply engrossed them.

At last the shrill-voiced clock, hung on a peg over the bar, chimed out the hour of midnight.

Besides the four men in the corner, there were Dakota Dave, Missouri Mose and one or two others, but as the four strangers made no move to go, neither did any of the rest.

"Mein frents," said Tony, coming out from behind the bar, and rolling up his apron; "dot vos twellav by der clock, und I vas want to shut up."

"Shut up then," growled one of the quartette; "who told you to say anything?"

"I don't was want to shut meinself up, mein friend, I was want to shut me up dot place und go to bed, und off you don'd go owit, how vas I shut him up?"

"Get out old Limburger, go take a tumble, we ain't going yet," said another of the group in the corner.

"So hellup me Shaky, I don'd dink mein droubles vas offer yet, already," said Flaxman, rolling up his sleeves.

"What's ther matter wid you?" the third man growled.

"I was wants you fellers to go owit."

"Well, we ain't a going!"

"Den, by Shimminy I bounced you oud, I vas got droubles enough to-night already midout some more. I keep me a stuffed club behind dot counter und off you makes me mat, I use him."

"Go soak your head."

"Give us a rest, old sour-kROUT."

"Go to bed if you like, we kin run the place as well as you."

"Don't give us any more chin-music, or I'll jump down yer throat."

Such were the responses made by the four to Tony's threat.

"By Shaky, I dinks somepody vas mistaken somewhere, and it don'd vas me. I show you who runs me dot blace."

With this the plucky Dutchman grabbed the first speaker by the throat, and dragged him, chair and all, out into the middle of the room before his astonished companions could interfere in any way.

Then he seized the man by the collar and the seat of his trousers, and having previously raised a window before tackling the man, literally "fired him out," the person alighting in the middle of a manure heap.

"Bully for you Flaxy," said Dave. "That 'ere's the way to bounce 'em."

One of the friends of the "bounced" took umbrage at this and began to pepper away at Dave with his six-shooter, while another threatened to "lay-out" Tony.

"By Shaky, I shtop my droubles right away, and all for onct, undershtand me?" and with a powerful blow from his big fist, he knocked the brawler flat.

The other two were about to assail him, when the door was thrown open and a masked figure appeared, with two drawn revolvers covering the scoundrels.

CHAPTER IV.

SUSPICIOUS CHARACTERS—A VILLAINOUS PLOT.

"Now clear out, every one of you," said the masked man, "and let Tony close his place."

Py shingoes, Denver Dan, I was glat to see you once more already," said Tony, who recognized our hero. "I was had me much droubles all de night, und I was blayed oud."

"Look here," said Dan to Dave and Mose, who were sneaking away, "you know who I am, and I know you, so be careful or the constables may get hold of you. As for you fellows," he said to the strangers, "I don't know you, except that you're a lot of squabbling villains, and may be horse thieves for all I know."

"Who are you, anyhow?" growled one of them.

"Never you mind. Just clear out of this place in two minutes or you'll find out who I am."

The man clapped his hand to his hip pocket, but Dan was on hand first.

As the rough threw up his hand a bullet came whizzing and took off the upper joint of his thumb, causing him to howl with pain, and drop his weapon, cursing like a madman.

The other three made a rush at Dan, the man whom Tony had respectively knocked down and thrown out of the window coming to the aid of the others.

Suddenly a shrill whistle was heard, and Dan was seen to have a silver call-whistle in his mouth.

Instantly at every window and door appeared a number of faces, all masked like the leader, and the gleam of a score of revolvers could be seen.

Dan stamped his foot, and half a dozen of his followers entered, seized the brawlers in their strong arms, and after depriving them of their weapons, kicked them ignominiously into the road.

"Denver Dan still lives, and the Mystic Band is stronger than ever," said the daring vigilante as the men hurried away. "Now, Flaxy, close up, and remember, twelve o'clock is the hour, and if you don't shut up then, no matter what excuse you make, you'll be fined."

"So hellup me Shaky, Mister Denver, I vas dhrying to close me up, on'y dem tam fools was oplige me to bounce dem, und dat takes dime."

"All right, Tony; we won't say anything about this time, seeing how well you behaved, but I've known you to stay open all night when you had a good run of custom, so look out."

"Mein Gott, I pelieves you was der teufel. You was knowed eberydings und den you tol' de sheriff und he sends dare gonstables. Maybe you was liked to take a drink."

"No, no, not any for me. Good night, Tony, and remember that if you are ever in need of help to keep the boys quiet, don't forget to call upon Denver Dan and his chums!"

Our hero departed and the band quietly dispersed, no one being able to tell where they went, leaving Dan alone with Jack and Joe Darrel, standing under the shadow of an old building.

"I have an idea, Dan," said Joe. "Who are those four fellows and what do they want? It looks suspicious, and do you know what I think? That those fellows are a part of the band of train robbers."

"Then we'll know one of them," answered Dan, "for I shot off the top of his thumb."

"Those fellows will meet again to-night, let me tell you, and I'm going to know where it is. I will see you and Jack at Ned Travis' in the morning."

"Very well, good-night."

Joe Darrel was one of Dan's most trusted aids, and he had been in the band so long and had done so many brave deeds that Dan was confident that when he once set about an affair, it was as good as saying it was done.

Darrel struck off towards the railroad, after leaving his leader and companions, and soon entered a deep cut where he knew a train was due shortly before two o'clock, bound west.

There was a disused tool-house, or shanty, more properly speaking, and it was here that Darrel presumed the four robbers, as he was sure they were, would meet and confer as to their plans of action.

He was right in his calculations, for after leaving the shelter of the hut by creeping cautiously along in the shadows, and hiding behind huge boulders at every suspicious noise, his patience and perseverance were rewarded, after waiting an hour under the lee of the shanty, to hear four

men approach and cautiously enter the same, when they struck a light and sat themselves down.

The light was so shaded that none of its rays shone towards the door of the hut, though several rays penetrated the chinks at the rear, and enabled the hidden man to see all he wanted of the interior.

The men were the same that had been in Flaxman's saloon, and Darrel took a good look at their faces so that he might be able to identify them at some future time.

"It's all right for the two o'clock, is it, Red?" asked one of the men, the person interrogated being easily identified before he answered by the appropriateness of the name given him, his hair and beard being of a most glaring, fiery red.

"Yes, it is, and she's due here in just five minutes. I have got the train all laid."

"To the middle of the track, with a good-sized rock on top of it to give the explosion more force?"

"Yes, right in the cattle-guard."

"That's all right. Lift up that stone, Jeff; and Sim, give me the candle."

The intention of the men was only too evident, as their further actions proved.

They were lighting a time fuse which would explode a mine under the approaching train and throw it from the track, after which they would proceed with the work of plunder.

CHAPTER V.

JOE DARREL'S "NARROWEST SQUEAK."

"SHE's got just three minutes to burn, Tom, and—sh! Blowed if that ain't the whistle now. It'll go off at the very minute."

"Then we want to [get! Ha-ha, it's burning bully, and has gone into the passage you made," said Tom, excitedly. "Scamper, you villains. Douse the glim, Jeff."

The light was put out; the men left the hut hurriedly, and took up safe positions upon the rocks, whence they could witness the explosion without any danger to themselves, and afterwards descend and finish their hellish work.

Darrel rushed into the shanty, revolver in hand, as soon as he could safely do so, but the fuse had burned so far in, being laid in a sort of tunnel the villains had dug, that there was no chance of reaching it without tearing up the entire foundation of the building, which would have occupied too much time.

Something must be done now, however, or the engine would be thrown from the track and the robbers would be enabled to carry out their dastardly plan in the confusion which would inevitably ensue.

The shriek of the engine was heard once more, and as Darrel ran out of the shanty the light from the signal lantern in front of the engine threw his figure into bold relief.

There was not an instant to be lost.

With one bound he reached the cattle-guard, and saw the fuse sputtering and hissing within a few inches of the mine.

There would be no time to remove this, and therefore the only thing to be done was to remove or put out the fuse before the engine came.

The thing had been well-timed, and Darrel saw by the way the fuse burned that the engine would be squarely over the mine at the very moment of the explosion.

The robbers evidently saw him, and divined his intention, for as he sprang into the cattle-guard, which was about three feet deep, a bullet whizzed over his head, fired by Jeff.

One moment more and it will be too late; Darrel will himself be sacrificed, and the engine disabled.

Joe seized the fuse just in front of the fire, and giving it a quick upward pull, detached it from the mine.

He threw it far from him, but at that instant the iron horse was upon him.

Dropping down into the narrow pit, he ducked in his head, and contracted his form into the narrowest possible limits.

The train swept on just above his head, there being about six inches to spare and no more.

To add to his danger, a live coal dropped from out the furnace and fell upon his shoulders, but though he felt the heat, and knew that in a few seconds it would burn through to his flesh, he never flinched, nor attempted to shake it from him, fearing that if he did it would fall into the magazine under him, and render his brave interference futile after all.

With a rush and a whirl, a rattle and a roar, the train dashed on, and in a moment the last car had passed over his head, and the danger was averted.

The coal began to burn into his flesh, and the pain and agony were intense, but with a quick movement he seized the fiery object in his bare hand, and flung it into the air.

Fanned by the wind it made the coal flamed into life, making a bright track in the darkness, and revealing to the robbers the position of the daring vigilante.

Darrel was masked, and therefore his enemies knew not if he were Dan or some one else, but that made little difference to them.

Joe jumped out of the pit as quickly as he could, not caring to remain there, and have the outlaws pepper him with their revolvers.

There was just enough light for them to distinguish his form, and as he hurried away they fired several shots at him, one of which cut the tassels from his hat-band.

Darrel did not intend that this battle should be by any means one-sided, and he returned the fire of the robbers with interest, hitting Jeff in the left leg and maiming him for life, and cutting off a good sized piece from Sim's ear.

"Four to one is bigger odds than I care to take," muttered Darrel to himself, "and, as there's no disgrace in declining such a risk, I'll get out of this. He who fights and runs away, stands a chance of getting in a whack some other time.

Giving the robbers the benefit of the remaining shots in his revolvers, Joe quickly got beyond range of the outlaws' bullets, and made his way into the city, where he presently found a place to snatch a few hours sleep before keeping his appointment with Dan and Jack.

He was on hand at the store of Ned Travis, where Dan lived with his wife and two children, having married Mary Travis some five years before, and to his commander and the latter's best bower he related his recent exciting experience, saying in conclusion:

"Blow me, Dan, if it warn't the narr'est squeak I ever had. I'm on the trail of those fellers now, and you shall have their likenesses, so that all of the Chums will know

'em. They are tough nuts, and you want to crack 'em as soon as you see 'em."

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE TRACK OF THE ROBBERS.

DAN now had the names and descriptions of the train robbers in his possession, and he determined to follow the rascals up and arrest them.

For all his searching, however, no traces of them could be found around Denver, and it was evident that they had taken fright and gone elsewhere to pursue their operations.

From two sources, Dan soon learned their probable whereabouts, and he and the Chums, as the Inner Circle members were now known, prepared to capture this quartette of daring thleves.

The first source of information was as follows:

Paddy Riley, an enterprising Irishman, who had transformed himself into a half-and-half Chinaman, the better to pursue his business of laundryman, being now known as Ri Lee, had more than once been suspected of harboring fugitives from justice in his house, and, indeed, a notorious burglar, known as Blue Dick, had been captured there not many months previous to the time of our story.

The enterprising Hal Barstow, cousin to handsome Jack Travis, took it into his busy head that the neighborhood of Paddy Riley's wash-house might be a good place in which to obtain information concerning the train robbers.

He, therefore, hied himself thither, but not in his own familiar character of the enterprising miner.

Oh, no, Hal knew better than that, and being very fertile in the matter of disguises, got up something entirely new for the occasion.

Two or three mornings after the exciting adventure of Darrel with the robbers, there sauntered into the wash-house office a good-looking, buxom specimen of the Irish maid-of-all-work, who, without further parley, delivered the following:

"Gud mornin', Mr. Riley. C'u'd ye be givin' a dacent girl a bit av ir'nin' to do, an' maybe a dab at washin', be the same token; it's tired I am wid travelin' up an' down the city a-lukin' for wurruk, sir, but whin I haps to think av ye, I knowed full well ye'd give me somethin' to occupy me till"—here her voice sank to a whisper—"till me man gets out o' jail."

Paddy Riley had listened impatiently to this long harangue, only waiting for an opportunity to tell the woman he wanted no one, but the last communication interested him, and he changed his mind.

"Who is your man, darlint?" he asked; his wife being above he could be tender with the woman before him unrebuked.

"Mick Burns, him as was in the faro-bank a-dalin' out the cards, an' sure there's no sin in doin' sich an innocent little thing as that, an' any polissman as would arrist the poor bye for on'y doin'——"

There was no knowing when she would have stopped if Riley had not suddenly interposed with:

"I know all about it, avick, and sure as ye says it's a mortal shame, an' I sympathize wid ye, an' I'm not the bye to deny ye a chance to 'arn an honest pinny. Are ye handy wid the iron?"

"Ain't I jist. Sure, yez wants to luk at the back of Mick's

head to see if I ain't. There's a shear there as long as your finger."

"Arrah, I don't mane in that way at all, but in schmooth-in' the shirts av the quality!"

"Give me wan av them an' it's moighty soon I'll demonshtrate that I'm as good as the bist."

Mrs. Burns, who, as our readers have doubtless guessed by this time, was only their old friend Hal in disguise, soon proved to Mr. Riley's entire satisfaction that she was indeed "as good as the best," and he made a place for her forthwith.

Hal kept his eyes and ears open, and before the day was out discovered that the Celtic Chinaman's wife had a female lodger, the same being the matrimonial partner of one Jeff Rhodes, a gentleman who relieved the dull monotony of a tiresome life by indulging in an occasional train robbery, in company with certain other congenial spirits.

He also learned that the aforesaid Jeff and his friends were going to attempt a robbery on the following night at a point some fifty miles east of Denver, where there would be no chance of being interrupted by Dan and his chums.

Dan received this bit of information from Hal, and Mrs. Burns did not go to work in the wash house the next day.

The other source of information was the telegraph, Dan having received a cipher dispatch telling him that four suspicious looking characters had been seen in the neighborhood of Blakestown, the station in question, and that it was thought they were the train robbers whose recent operations had produced so much excitement.

Hal took the train for the latter place early in the day, and Dan prepared to follow some hours later.

Hal was disguised as a tramp, and he had no trouble in running across the men, though he had no idea what a thrilling experience was before him.

CHAPTER VII.

HAL AND THE ROBBERS—AN UNSUSPECTED DISCLOSURE.

A DIRTY-LOOKING tramp was walking along the railroad track, munching a bit of bread, early one afternoon, and when about five miles from a certain station, came upon two men evidently idling their time by walking on the rails, from which they would frequently slip.

"Hallo, pards!" he said. "Got any 'backer? I've a pipe, but nuthin' to load it with."

The two men looked at the fellow, and then one of them gave him a piece of plug tobacco, which he cut up and put into his black pipe.

"Ye ain't got a light, have ye?" was the tramp's next question. "If ye can't, gimme a lock o' your hair, that'll be just as good."

The remark was appropriate, as the hair of the man addressed was very red and fiery in its color.

"Give him a match, Jeff," said the red-headed man, with a laugh.

The tramp, Hal Barstow, of course, puffed away on his pipe and soon had the tobacco converted into a red and glowing mass, from which curled a slender wreath of smoke, while the clouds that issued from his lips were thick and heavy.

"Ye don't know where I could get a job, do ye?" he asked, after a pause.

"What kind?"

"Anything—I ain't particular what."

"You don't look as if ye was fond o' hard work," said Jeff.

"Well, I ain't—not onless I kin make a good strike. I'd like to start a bank, now."

Both men laughed at the idea of a tramp starting a bank.

"I mean with a jimmy, or a crowbar, or su'thin' o' that sort," he explained.

"Oho! that's your style, is it? Ye're on the crackin' lay."

"Bet yer boots, I is! What's your little racket? sluggin' or confidence?"

"Ye ain't got no cheek, are ye?" responded Red.

"No, I ain't. Look here, I ain't no slouch, and I kin tell a good hand when I see him; besides that I read the papers when I gits a chance to hook one, and I see that Red Rogers is about. 'F I was you, I'd cover up that carrot field or color it, and put a bit o' chalk on that 'ere big scar acrost your forehead."

"You know me," said the robber, making a movement toward his pistol pocket.

"Well, I should grin. So'll everybody know ye if ye will carry yer sign about wi' ye. An', if I ain't mistaken, this is Mr. Jeff Rhodes?"

"How d'ye know that?"

"By this," and Hal took a piece of crumpled newspaper from a pocket and spreading it out, read the description of the train robbers.

"Now where's Tom and Sim? Waiting for ye down the road?"

"Where d'ye git that paper?"

"Found it on the track; man chucked it out of the car winder, I s'pose. Knowed ye as soon as I seed ye. Tell ye, I ain't no slouch, and I'm allus ready to put a feller on his guard. I'm wanted myself, back in Denver, for strikin' a knife atween a fellow's ribs, but I ain't goin'."

Red looked at Jeff inquiringly, as if to say,

"Is it safe?"

Jeff nodded affirmatively, and then said to Hal:

"Do you know whether the cops are after us, or the marshals?"

"No, but they will be if you don't play the thing a little less bold."

"Ahem!"

"Can ye handle a bar?"

"Hooked six one day an' sold 'em for drinks?"

"Are ye any good on pryin'?"

"I should leer if I wasn't. I'm first class on prying, I am, can't be beat for a feller o' my size. Why, I've been pryin' all the mornin'."

So he had, though the robber did not understand his real meaning.

"You could manage to move a rail out of its place so that when a train came along there'd be a smash."

"Yes; when are ye going to work it?" asked Hal, eagerly, as if anxious to go to work at once on that particular job.

"To-night; down the road a bit, where there's a curve and a gully. You're a little feller, but ye look strong."

"And so I are: ye kin jest rely on me, pards, to astonish ye."

"All right; as ye thinks there may be somebody on the lay for us, we'll let ye do the work as far as tumblin' the ingine goes, and then we'll come down on the passengers and you kin help us in that, the more the better."

"That's all right. Ye wouldn't mind walkin' a little funder, would ye, so's to show us the place?"

The spot was pointed out, and then Hal went away promising to be on hand at dark to help remove the rail from its place.

After he had parted from the thieves the young man made haste to the telegraph station, where he sent Dan a message, bidding him come on at once without delay with warrants for the arrest of the four villains.

He did not know that Sim was watching him, nor that he heard the message as it was clicked out by the instrument, reading it as it proceeded.

Sim had formerly been a telegraph operator himself, and could read messages by sound, and consequently Hal's identity was at once made known to him.

"All right, my lad," he muttered to himself when Hal had gone out. "It takes a mighty smart man to overhaul us, and you ain't got the right amount of brains, I kin tell ye."

CHAPTER VIII.

HALL FALLS INTO BAD HANDS.

NEVER suspecting that the telegraph machine had disclosed his secret, Hal left the office and strolled along the road, turning over one plan after another in his mind and rejecting them all, until at last he hit upon one which he thought would answer.

He had not seen the robber in the station, the latter being behind a large ornamental screen upon which were pasted various railroad advertisements and time-tables, which he appeared to be earnestly studying.

The clicking of the instrument had attracted his attention, and when he discovered that the message was for "Daniel Fleming, Sheriff, Denver," he became all attention.

He watched Hal going down the road from the window, and, after he had gone from sight, followed after him, branching off, however, at a by-path, and reaching the place where he knew his accomplices were long before Hal could have done so, if he had been upon that errand, which he was not, but merely lounging about.

Sim immediately informed his companions of Hal's intended betrayal of them, and was surprised to learn that he had engaged to assist them that evening.

"Then he's one of Denver Dan's chums, and we've got to look out for ourselves. D'ye think Dan can git here afore the evenin'?"

"Course he kin," said Red. "He kin git here at six o'clock from Denver."

"It's dark then, ain't it? We'll have to go below the station, 'stead of above it, and chuck that train o' his'n from the track."

"They ain't no place as good as this other one."

"Can't help it, Tom. Stop! ain't they a lot o' new ties strung along the road below the station? We kin throw her off with a lot o' them."

"And this young cuss what's gone back on us?" suggested Red.

"Fasten him on the track, and kill two birds wi' one stick o' timber! Collar him when he comes round to-night, an' lug him down there."

"But he ain't to meet us till dark."

"The deuce he ain't. Ye've got to git hold of him, I tell you. He may be gittin' the constables to lay for us now, this very instant. Tell ye what. I'll look out for him in the woods and plug him. He's got to come back that way."

"What'll ye do then?"

"Meet Red at the switch with him, and we'll fetch him down to you fellers. It ain't very far from dark now, not more'n an hour, and I want all that."

"Then Tom an' me had better go below and hunt for a good place," said Jeff.

"Yes; move along, 'cause they ain't no time to lose."

Hal was returning along the road to the villiage, which at a certain point led through a patch of woods, dark, dreary, and almost impenetrable, the arching branches completely shutting out the sunlight and making the place damp and unwholesome, even in the hottest weather.

He had made up his mind to place an old lantern upon the track where it could be seen by the engineer of the doomed train, but not by the robbers themselves, as in that case he knew the former would be stopped and some one sent ahead to see what the matter was.

As he was passing through the thickest part of the stretch of woods a stone, bit of wood, or missile of some kind, was suddenly hurled at him, striking him on the head, and for an instant completely bewildering him.

Before he could recover himself, a man sprang out from

behind a tree and threw a thick cloth or bag over his head nearly smothering him.

Then he was thrown down and bound hand and foot, after which the man picked him up, and throwing him over his shoulder, started down the road at as speedy a pace as possible.

The man was Sim, and after going some little distance, he was met by Red, who assisted him to carry their prisoner along the track, darkness having set in by the time they reached their comrades.

Hal was then released and placed upon his feet, the cloth removed from his head so that he could breathe, and the cords taken from his ankles, after which he was thus addressed by Red:

"We've got you now, young feller, an' ye ain't goin' to get away. Ye think ye can fetch Denver Dan down on us, don't ye? You an' him won't be good fur much in an hour from now."

"You can't frighten me, my man; I've been in too many scrapes for that," answered Hal, boldly. "Dan and his chums have got you spotted, and your game's as good as up."

"Think so, sonny?" said Jeff. "You an' Dan 'll hev the pleasure o' climbin' the golden stairs together to-night, fur we're goin' to wreck that train o' his'n, and send you to glory both to onet, though you'll git a little the start of him."

"Never mind the chinnin', Jeff," remarked Red, "you fellows has got the obstruction good an' solid!"

"Yes."

"Then come along and fix this chicken fur roastin'. Fetch the ropes."

They hurried Hal along between them and presently stopped, about twenty rods from where the obstruction had been built, but around a curve.

Then they tied cords around Hal's wrists and ankles, and laying him on the ties passed the loose ends of the ropes around the rails and made all fast.

CHAPTER IX.

IN DEADLY PERIL—HAL'S HAIRBREADTH ESCAPE.

HAL did not touch the rails either with his head or feet, being placed diagonally across the ties, but his position was none the less perilous for that.

He would be crushed by the engine if not run over by the wheels, and his agony would be more prolonged than if his head were at once taken off, every successive truck as it passed over his body crushing and mangling him more than the last.

His feet and hands were comparatively free, although he could not hope to release them from the rails, his ankles and wrists being bound, each one separately by the tough rope.

As the men completed their horrible preparations and moved away, Jeff bestowed a parting taunt upon the luckless fellow; the distant shriek of the approaching locomotive was heard and poor Hal's heart sank within him as he realized the full extent of his peril.

There was no use in appealing to the villains for he knew they were merciless, and he therefore held his peace.

He would not let the scoundrels see that he felt the danger of his position, and to their bitter taunts he made no reply, nor showed upon his countenance the fear he actually felt.

He had been in so many situations of peril before that he could not help feeling that some release would come, totally unexpected by either himself or his captors, and this hope sustained him in his hour of danger.

The robbers moved down the track towards the point at which they had placed the obstruction, and as this was around a curve Hal soon lost sight of them.

Again he heard the signal of the coming train, sounding more distinctly than before, and soon it came again, this time fairly making his form quiver with the increased volume of sound.

Now he hears the bell and the puffing of the smoke, the rattle of wheels, the escape of the steam, and all the other

incidental sounds, the broad track of light shed by the approaching monster bathing him in its effulgence.

He groans in agony for there is no sign of coming aid, no hope of staying the hand of death, no chance of escape.

The engine is within a few rods now, but that distance will soon be covered, when he hears a cry of horror in a well-remembered voice.

It is Denver Dan's.

"Save me, Dan!" he cries, now speaking for the first time; "save me for the sake of old times."

Then he hears the sharp report of a rifle and closes his eyes, expecting and welcoming death, swift and sudden, rather than the lingering, agonizing torture of the fate intended for him by the train robbers.

* * * * *

Dan had taken the train in pursuance of Hal's telegraphic advice, and had with him Joe Darrel and two or three of the band.

Joe was well acquainted with the engineer of the train, and he proposed to Dan that they should ride upon the locomotive for the novelty of the thing.

Dan consented, and the two took their seats, enjoying the uninterrupted view of the country which their position gave them, and now and then chatting upon general topics.

Both Dan and Joe had their repeating rifles with them, as it was not certain but that they would have a fight with the train robbers, and in that event they meant to be well prepared.

Time passed away rapidly and the night came on, dark and cloudy, with indications of a storm, but still Dan and his chum sat gazing out upon the country which seemed to be flying by them, while they remained motionless.

They were approaching some station or cross-road, and the engineer had whistled several times, Dan paying very little attention to it, however, but speaking in a louder tone to Joe, who listened attentively.

Suddenly Dan, happening to glance out ahead of him, saw something which fairly made his hair stand on end.

The object which had so excited him was the body of a young man lying upon the track, between the rails, securely tied, hand and foot, in order to prevent his escape.

Dan uttered a cry of horror, and sprang to his feet, shouting to the engineer:

"Whistle down brakes; there's a man tied to the track!"

Then he heard Hal's startling cry for help, and seizing his rifle from its place on the seat, raised it to his shoulder and took aim.

"What are you doing?" said Darrel. "Would you kill him?"

"No, but the cords that bind his hands to the rails."

"Good. I will cut those about his feet."

The sharp, short, danger signal rang out upon the night, and at the same time two rifle shots, sounding as one.

Hal felt the strain upon his ankles and wrists suddenly removed, and realizing what had been done, rolled from the track as the train came along at a slackened rate of speed.

CHAPTER X.

AN UNACCOUNTABLE DISAPPEARANCE.

DAN and Joe had accomplished a most remarkable feat of marksmanship, and although they were both considered good shots before, they would now be held doubly so.

Standing in the cab of a railway locomotive, going at a considerable speed, and with anything but a steady motion, they had aimed at and struck fairly a most difficult mark, the ropes tied about a man's wrists and ankles, and then fastened about an iron rail.

Their shots were simultaneous, and both ropes were severed as if by a knife, at the same moment.

It was a terrible risk to take, for the least miss in aim might send a bullet through Hal's wrist or into his foot, thus increasing his chances of meeting a terrible death.

The speed of the engine had been reduced greatly, but

not enough to prevent an accident had Hal remained on the track.

When he felt himself released he quickly rolled from the track upon the road, but realizing that the danger was not yet passed, he shouted out at the top of his voice:

"Stop that train! There's danger right ahead of you."

As they swept around the curve Dan saw the obstruction, and had the train been going at full speed there could have been no escaping a terrible accident.

The brakemen had crowded on all the brakes, however, and jammed them hard down, so that the engine was now simply overcoming the momentum it had obtained.

It came to a pause within a few feet of the obstruction, and Dan, Joe, the conductor, engineer, fireman and one or two passengers jumped to the ground.

"There goes one of the ruffians!" yelled Dan, as a dark figure went scurrying up the track.

He fired almost upon the instant. There was a shriek of pain, and a sound as of a falling body, and then a volley from the rest of the gang, concealed behind the rocks.

Joe sent in one or two rapid shots towards the place whence these shots had come, and as they were not repeated, he concluded that he had dislodged the enemy, or that they had thought it best to crawl away unseen and unnoticed.

The train hands soon removed the obstruction, Joe going ahead to see after the man whom Dan had shot, and Dan himself returning to Hal, who he thought might need some assistance.

Joe found the man quite dead, Dan's bullet having taken him in the back of the head and penetrated at once to the brain, causing almost instant death.

The fiery red hair of the victim, now stained a deeper red by the blood which oozed from the bullet hole, proved the man's identity beyond a doubt, and told Joe that Red Rogers, the train robber, had at last paid the penalty of his many crimes.

Dan walked back to where he thought Hal ought to be, but not seeing him called out to know where he was.

He received no answer, and was rather surprised thereat, as he had himself seen Hal betake himself out of the way of danger, and wondered why he did not answer.

Thinking that perhaps the young man had fainted from over excitement, he borrowed a lantern from the conductor and walked along the track, searching diligently for any traces of his friend, but without success.

It was very puzzling, and he called to his friends to come and consult with him upon the matter, thinking that perhaps some of them might have seen Hal since the train had stopped.

There were Joe, Mike Halcraft, Sandy Davidson, and Martin all together, besides Dan, and they quickly came together at the latter's summons, wondering what the matter could be that Dan should be so excited, for he was usually the very personification of coolness.

None of them had seen Hal since the stopping of the train, and none knew of his peril except Joe Darrel, of course, and he was as much surprised as Dan at their chum's mysterious disappearance.

"Tell me all about it," said Mike. "Ye say the bye war on the thrack, an' that ye shot him aff an' he lay in the sand whin ye rolled by on the engine."

"Yes."

"An' ye rin afther the robbers fust afore ye come back to him?"

"Yes."

"An' they got away somewheres, ye can't tell where?"

"Probably."

"Thin they have carried him off, so as to be sure to have vengeance on him fur something, we don't know what."

"We will follow the villains, and if they dare harm a hair of his head, woe betide them!" said Dan, fiercely.

"Now jist wait," said Mike. "The engine is starting up. Get aboard, an' go up to the town an' scatter over the

country. I'll stay here till ye've gone an' thin do my own huntin'. We don't want to go all in a lump."

"What Mike says is reasonable," interposed Dan, "and we had better act upon his suggestions. We must scour the whole neighborhood for those villains, and let the local authorities know of their presence."

The vigilantes got aboard the train, leaving Mike behind, the latter saying, as the train swept from sight:

"If I don't find the lad an' give those crathurs a lesson, thin ye may call me a Chinayse."

CHAPTER XI.

HAL AGAIN IN BAD HANDS.

As will readily be supposed, Hal had been seized by the three remaining robbers, and hurried away between them, before Dan had reached the spot where he had last seen the young man.

The rope which secured his feet to the rail had been cut, to be sure, but his feet themselves were so tied that he could not get up, and therefore was obliged to wait for assistance.

The robbers hurried away with him, tying a bandage over his mouth to prevent his crying out, which he would certainly have done had they given him the chance.

"We haven't done with ye yet, my buck," said Jeff, "though ye got away so well. We'll take blasted good care that ye won't do it again."

Down the track they hastened until they came to a crossing, when they struck off into a piece of woods where all trace of them would be lost.

They dragged the poor fellow so rapidly over the ties that one of his shoes came off, for he did not wear boots like the rest of the party.

He said nothing about it though, hoping that some of his comrades might see the shoe and so track him to where the thieves were now taking him.

When they entered the woods the robbers proceeded at a less rapid pace, although they appeared to know just where they were going, notwithstanding the darkness.

After having gone about a score of rods they stopped at a little hut, which had been erected by the surveyors when running the line of the road, and which had remained when they had no further use for it.

Into this they went, and Hal was placed in one corner, while the others lit a fire and proceeded to discuss their plans, not too freely, however, for they did not know who might be listening.

"Where's Red?" said Sim, suddenly.

"We won't see him again," was Tom's answer. "Them cusses popped him in the head and gave him a settler. I got a crack myself that I don't fancy much. It'll make me use my left hand to fire a pistol with."

"What are you going to do with this feller?" asked Jeff.

"Hang him."

"No, that won't do."

"Shoot him."

"Worse yet."

"Cut his throat."

"Pshaw, that ain't good enough."

"You want to kill him?"

"Yes."

"All these things 'll do it."

"They are too quick."

"Ho—ho, I see."

"What's a good slow and sure death?"

"Something to last a long time?"

"Yes."

"But bound to settle him in the end?"

"That's it."

The robbers thought a moment.

"Roast him," said Tom.

"Tear him to pieces between two saplings."

This humane idea originated in Jeff's fertile brain.

"Hang him up by the heels and use him as a target, only don't kill him," suggested Sim.

"None of 'em will do," said Jeff, at last, impatiently. "Them chums of his'n are likely to pop into us at any moment and spoil the whole business."

"Then kill him at once and have it over with," said Sim.

"Stop, I've got it," Tom said suddenly.

"What is it?"

"You know the quarry?"

"Where they got the stuff for the culverts and bridges?"

"Ahem."

"What of it?"

"Take him there."

"Well?"

"Lay him on a nice rough rock."

"Yes?"

"Pile stones on him."

"Well?"

"Not all at once."

"No."

"One at a time."

"Ha, ha!"

"Light at first?"

"Yes."

"Then heavier."

"I see."

"Then heavier yet."

"You've got it."

"But not too fast!"

"Oh, no."

"Give him time to enjoy it."

"Certainly."

"Crush his life out."

"Tain't any more'n he deserves."

"Not a bit."

"He's got a strong chest?"

"Oh, yes."

"But it can't stand everything."

"No."

"Smooth stones are no good?"

"For the first ones? No."

"Get nice rough, sharp-edged ones?"

"That's it."

"Something to cut?"

"Ha! ha!"

"Then pile the others on top?"

"Good enough!"

"Think it will work?"

"Bully!"

"Let's get about it then."

This conversation had been thus cruelly prolonged and drawn out in detail in order to torture Hal all the more, for of course he could hear every word of it.

Though the doomed young man knew that these wretches were capable of doing all they said, he never stirred nor showed that he was at all disturbed by what they said, for that he well knew would please them better than anything in the world.

Rising from their seats upon the ground, they lifted him to his feet, and Jeff, removing the gag from his mouth, said:

"You heard what we said?"

"Yes."

"You know what we're going to do?"

"Yes."

"You know we'll do it?"

"You are capable of doing it."

"Would you like to get off?"

No answer.

"Do you want to know how you can?"

"Say what you're going to, without any more fuss about it. What proposition do you wish to make?"

"Will you let him off, boys, if he gets us Denver Dan?"

"Yes."

"Will you do it, young feller?"

"Betray my leader?"

"Yes."

"Never."

"Think o' what's before ye an' then——"

"Never, I say."

"Ye won't go back on him?"

"Never."

"Not to save yer own life?"

"Never."

"Fetch him along, boys. We'll see whether the obstinate cuss can be brought round or not!"

CHAPTER XII.

WHERE MIKE WENT AND WHAT HE FOUND.

MIKE HALCRAFT was never without that very useful article, a dark lantern, when out upon an expedition like the present, and now as he starts down the road he throws an occasional glance ahead of him to see if there are any traces of those of whom he is in pursuit.

He goes down the road because he is pretty sure the outlaws did not go up.

Red went up and was shot, therefore the villains, profiting by his untimely fate, would naturally go down.

That is, if they took the road at all.

Mike knows that there is a possibility that the men may have struck at once across country, but he thinks he will try the road for a little while.

He flashes his light, after having gone some considerable distance, and sees some dark object on the track in front of him.

He hastens forward, picks it up and examines it.

It is a man's shoe.

"Begorrah, I've got a find!" he says to himself. "Nobody but Hal wears shoes in our party."

As if that fact were not enough for him, the owner's name is written inside, in indelible ink, identifying it beyond a doubt.

"Then he's gone this way, that's sure enough," he mutters, putting the shoe in his pocket. "I am right, so far; now to proceed."

He does proceed, and before long finds several shreds of cotton torn from Hal's sock, and by-and-by the sock itself, or what is left of it.

"Begorrah, I'm right afther the blackguards," he says to himself. "I'm sorry for the b'y's fut, but I'm mortal glad the shoe came off."

When Mike came to the crossing he had an idea that the three scoundrels might possibly have turned off, and he therefore examined the ground very carefully on both sides of the track.

There had been sand thrown down at this point, in order to make a good road through the woods, the soil being rather boggy, and in this sand there were several footprints.

Mike examined these carefully, and it was not long before he discovered the traces of a bare foot among the others.

"Be Heavens, it's all right!" he cried. "They've sthruck aff intil the woods. Be gob! I'm afther thim!"

Into the woods he went, picking his way along carefully, but guided by the footprints in the soft earth and upon the many patches of moss in the way.

Before long he found the trail and saw the traces of a recent fire, the embers being still hot.

He saw where Hal had laid in one corner of the hut, and he saw several shreds of rope, which the prisoner had pulled off of his hands by aid of his teeth, scattered upon the floor.

Mike knew that Hal had been brought to this place and taken away again, but whither, was the question which puzzled him.

He hunted and searched, but although he could see the entering footsteps of his chums, he could see none which led from the shanty.

At last an idea struck him, after following the other footprints for some little distance.

The villains were carrying Hal in order to make more

rapid progress, for with his bare foot he could not walk as fast as his captors.

"I have it now, by gum!" he muttered. "That's what they're doin'. Maybe they think some man will be trackin' thim, and they don't want his futprint to be seen."

This didn't satisfy him, however, and after thinking a moment, still following the trail with his lantern, he murmured:

"No, that's not it, for here's three tracks all right, and if they was afraid of his bein' seen, they'd thry to cover their own."

"No, sir; they're luggin' him so's to make betther time. I know they're doin' it, be the depth of the futprints."

"Be gob, they can't go so fast, and that's what I want. I jist wondher where they are goin' wid him, anyhow! I'd give a dollar to know fur sure."

He was soon given an inkling of this, for he had been to this town before, and knew a good many of its localities.

Before long he found that the tracks led into a regular beaten path, running down hill, and in the direction of Denver.

He knew the path in a moment, and knew also that it led to a quarry near the railroad.

Almost as well as though he had been told, the acute Irishman knew that the villains were taking Hal to the quarry for some hellish purpose of their own, though what it was he knew not.

Abandoning the following of the trail, since he now knew, for a certainty almost, whither the villains were going, he hurried along the path like a sleuth-hound, occasionally stopping for a moment to listen, and once in a great while examining the soft spots in the path for footprints.

"What divil's wurruk are they up to now?" he asks himself. "Be the hokey! there's a pit full up av wather in the quarry, and maybe the blackguards are going to dhrown him in it. Be gob, he's no kitten, and no such indignity shall be put on him, not if I know it."

Along the path he hurries, and reaches the quarry at last, lantern in one hand, revolver in the other.

He hears voices as he moves noiselessly down the path leading to the pits, and he recognizes one of them.

It is that of Tom.

Cocking his revolver, he dashes forward, and comes upon a most thrilling scene.

The villains are piling heavy stones upon the chest of a half-naked man, who is securely bound and laid upon his back.

"Aha! ye divils, ye're at work, are ye?" he yells; "so am I."

That he is at work, and in earnest, too, is evinced by the rapid discharge of the several chambers of his revolver among the villains.

It is work that tells, too, for, with a death shriek, Tom falls to the ground, the others hastily taking flight, a shower of bullets rattling after them.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARTIN ON THE TRACK—THE PREY ESCAPES.

THE honest-hearted Irishman lost no time in releasing Hal from his uncomfortable position, though fortunately for him the villains had only just got to work.

If Mike had not known almost by intuition that the trio were going to the quarry, but had been obliged to track them the whole distance, Hal's sufferings would have been well-nigh ended by the time he had arrived.

As it was, he was none too soon, for the jagged rocks were beginning to cut into his flesh and render his breathing painful.

Mike lifted the stones from off Hal's breast, encouraging him in the meantime by cheering words, and promising to avenge the insult fully at the first opportunity.

"I am glad I found ye, my bye," he said when he had thrown off the last weight. "Wan av those divils has

pegged out, and if I ain't mistaken, we'll peg the rist before manny days."

"How did you happen to find me, Mike?"

"Oh, I guessed the way. Pit on yer clothes, me lad, the air is cowl'd, and ye might catch yer death. How is this, ye've only wan shoe?"

"I lost the other."

"I thought ye might want wan, and here it is," said the sly fellow, giving Hal his own shoe."

"Ha, ha! I see. You traced me by this."

"Partly, and partly be my own knowledge of the locality," and Mike related how he had followed the trail, from the moment he found the shoe until his assault upon the murderous three.

Mike had a brandy flask with him, and he made Hal swallow a few drops, though the latter was not in the habit of drinking.

In this instance, however, it seemed to do him good, warming him up and lessening the pain he felt, as the villains had by no means dealt lightly with him.

As there was no further hope of meeting the two villains again that night, Hal and Mike betook themselves to the town, where it was exceedingly likely they would meet Dan and his party.

They went at once to the hôtel, where Hal washed himself and took a hot bath, feeling very much better after it; following which the two strolled into the reading-room and took seats, Mike smoking a cigar and Hal reading a newspaper.

They had been there half an hour or more when Dan and Joe came in, and were delighted to find their comrades, not expecting to see them so soon.

Mike related the whole story, and Dan congratulated Hal upon his lucky escape from a horrible death, adding quietly:

"I don't fancy these fellows will altogether like the summary manner in which we have disposed of two of their gang to-night, and I doubt if they will remain in these parts very long, even if they haven't already left."

"We're doin' 'em up brown, and no mistake," added Joe Darrel. "We ought to arrest the other two, though, and so finish the job once for all. There was only four, wasn't there?"

"That's all, as far as I can learn."

"Jeff's wife is in Denver," said Hal. "Hadn't cousin Jack better shadow her, to find out whether she hears from him or if he goes there?"

"Jack has his instructions," was Dan's quiet answer, thus proving how thorough he was in everything he undertook.

It was now after nine o'clock, and Hal, being completely tired out with the many startling adventures of the day, went off to bed, leaving Dan to write a long letter to his vice-commander, and Joe Darrel and the rest to stroll about town.

Joe and Mike went together, leaving Martin and Sandy to pair off by themselves, and before long the pair got separated—Mike meeting an old friend and stopping to talk with him, and Joe becoming interested in a game of poker which two miners were having in a corner of the bar at the "Guzzlers' Glory," a "one-horse tavern," as the vigilantes called it.

Martin and Sandy found a second-class variety theater in full blast, and they paid their way in with the crowds that still surged through the doors, though the performance was nearly half over.

They soon lost each other in the crowd, not being able to procure seats, and Martin, standing with his back against a pillar, stood watching the girations of a contortionist, when he suddenly saw a man in front of him whose face troubled him.

He could see only a part of it, and the air was so full of tobacco smoke—it being a sort of rough-and-tumble place—that nothing could be seen distinctly except the performers.

Presently the man turned and then he saw his face, being himself screened from observation, recognizing it at once as that of Sim, the train-robber.

Martin had not had as good a description of the men given to him as some of the others, and consequently had been puzzled when he first saw the man, but now he was sure of him.

The fellow kept his eyes shaded under the brim of a slouched hat, and a scarf about his neck covered his chin, reaching to his heavy black mustache.

Having recognized the man, the next thing to do was to arrest him, not an easy undertaking, considering the time and place.

Martin looked around for Sandy, but saw nothing of him, the crowd being thicker than ever, owing to the fact that a number of brazen-faced women, calling themselves "European artists," were soon to execute a ballet dance in exceedingly scant and gauzy apparel.

Martin's man did not appear to care very much for the alleged personal attractions of the young women, and after the first figure of the dance he turned to leave the theater.

Martin followed, keeping hid himself, for fear that Sim might possibly recognize him, and still being not more than three paces behind.

Their progress through the dense mass of human beings was necessarily slow, particularly as some of the men made decided objections to being pushed from their points of vantage, and stated their objections in language which was strong, if not particularly adapted to polite society.

They managed to reach the bar at last, and Sim stepped up, indulged in a little liquid refreshment, Martin observing him from behind a couple of loungers.

Just as the man raised the glass to his lips there was heard a scream and then a roar, followed by that most terrible of all sounds:

"Fire!"

Then there was a wild stampede, a rush of frenzied, cursing, fighting men, which fairly swept the loungers in the bar off their feet.

It seems that some roughly-clad and more roughly-spoken miner had voiced his disapproval of the stage performance in rather a loud key, which had led to a fight, during which a flying missile had struck one of the stage lamps and broken it.

The draperies caught fire at once, and the women ran shrieking from the stage, only adding to the panic by their hysterical cries.

Martin was carried with the rush of excited men into the street, and when he managed to extricate himself from the troubled mass his prey was missing.

CHAPTER XIV.

NARROWING DOWN THE LAWLESS BAND.

"How provoking!" muttered the young man. "I would have had him in a few minutes."

The crowd continuing to pour from the place, he was obliged to move further away from the door so as to obtain an unobstructed view of the street, where he fancied the robber might still be lingering.

The fire was soon put out, but the crowd did not care to go back, once having arrived safely upon the outside, and the sidewalks were crowded with loungers, smoking, swearing, and swaggering, and making a perfect pandemonium of the usually quiet town.

Martin soon found Sandy, and related how close he had come to making a prisoner, Sandy listening with great interest.

The two then strolled along the street in the direction of the hotel, intending to retire, or if they should happen to meet their comrades, of staying out longer.

They had got beyond the crowd, and were in rather a dark quarter of the town, when Martin suddenly whispered to his companion:

"Get out your revolver; there is our man ahead of us, just passing under that light. See him?"

"Yes; you're sure of him?"

"Of course; follow me up easy now, and come in just when I want you."

Martin left his companion, and walking rapidly ahead, passed the man, turning suddenly, however, and saying abruptly:

"Hallo, Sim, is that you?"

The man started, and Hal saw that he had not been mistaken.

"Yes, who the —— are you?" growled the fellow, attempting to pass.

"Stop where you are, my friend; I have a warrant for your arrest!"

Sim made a dive for his revolver, but Sandy caught his hand as it reached the hip-pocket, and he quickly confined the wrist thereof in one half of a pair of handcuffs.

Martin grabbed the other hand and performed a like service for it, the fellow being completely taken by surprise, though he attempted to bluster a little.

"You fellows are too airy," he said, "too darnation funny. Who the blank are you, anyhow?"

"United States deputy marshals, my friend, and chums of Denver Dan, of whom you have heard, I suppose."

At the mention of Denver Dan the bravado vanished, and the man at once weakened, allowing himself to be marched along without resistance, merely hissing out:

"Cuss you an' him too; ye can't let a feller alone, kin ye?"

"Not fellows of your stripe."

The man was first taken to the hotel and given in charge of Dan, who examined him and then handed him over to the town authorities, his latest crime having been committed within the limits of their jurisdiction.

He confessed everything, being considerably depressed by the terrible fate of his two companions in guilt and his own prospects of spending a considerable term in prison.

As to Jeff he did not know where he was, the two having separated after Mike's sudden onslaught, since which they had not been together.

He had remained in the town because he considered himself safe in a crowd, and had no idea that such a stir would be made about him.

"My dear sir," said Dan, "when Denver Dan and his chums take hold of a piece of work they do not leave it until it is finished. You and your gang have been making a general nuisance of yourselves, and the time had come to put an end to that sort of thing."

"All other means failing, we took the matter in hand ourselves, and you see with what result. Is Jeff the only one left?"

"There's three or four more, but they don't count for much. They was only a kind of runners, heelers, spies, or whatever you like."

"Whatever I don't like, you mean. You can give me their names and occupations if you will."

"No, I'm blessed if I will."

"Very well, I think my friends, the magistrates and lawyers of this county, can add a few years to your term in prison, if they choose," said Dan coolly, and the fellow at once broke down and gave the required information, Dan making careful notes of the same.

Having accomplished all that could be expected for one day, it being now something after eleven o'clock, Dan and his friends sought the seclusion of their rooms and slept soundly until morning.

Mike and Darrel came in soon after, and were surprised to hear of the clever capture, complimenting Martin upon his skill as a thief-taker.

"Ha, ha, Mike," said Joe, laughing, "my lieutenants have both distinguished themselves to-day. Where were you all this time?"

"Loafing around wid wan o' the captains an' helpin' him neglect his dhuty," said Mike, and then they both laughed.

The first thing in the morning Dan sent the following message to Jack Travis at Denver:

"All disposed of but Jeff. Watch for him and shadow his wife. Have written a full account."

"DAN."

Hal went up to Denver on the first train, and Darrel and Martin on the next, Mike and Dan remaining over night, and the others going east a few miles on the track of one or two of the confederates of the gang.

Jack, after receiving Dan's telegram, kept up a constant lookout for the missing Jeff, haunting the neighborhood of Riley's wash-house, in various disguises, for two whole days, without learning a thing.

Then Dan returned, and also the remaining members of the party, with two of the "runners," in custody, the others having eluded pursuit.

"We have given them a scare, at all events," said Dan, "and we may miss Jeff altogether. I hate to lose him, though."

"His wife hasn't left yet, and until she does, you can bet on his turning up at any moment," answered Jack, confidently.

The next day, as Dan was sitting in his office making up a report of the case, Hal came to him with a message from Jack.

"The man is in Denver," he said, "and is hiding somewhere in the mountains. Cousin Jack says he fancies he may be in the Devil's Gulch, and that we had better send a force there while he watches Riley's."

"If he is in the gulch I will go myself; and, failing a discovery, I shall issue a warrant against Mr. Riley for harboring a criminal. I think that will fetch him."

CHAPTER XV.

THE ADVENTURE IN DEVIL'S GULCH.

THE Devil's Gulch has previously been described in the stories in which our hero appears, and it will not be necessary to repeat that description further than to say that the place was a deep gully in the mountains, with precipitous sides, where many men had lost their lives in trying to reach the bottom, and where more than one murder had been thought to have taken place.

To this place of ill report went Denver Dan, all undaunted, for he knew every inch of the locality and had been to the bottom upon several occasions.

Without hesitation, therefore, he made his way down the narrow, almost imperceptible path, clinging to stumps of trees, gnarled trunks and roots, projecting rocks and stout bushes, until he reached the bottom, where a semi-twilight always prevailed during the brightest days, and at night a black darkness.

There was a cave at the bottom, leading off from a narrow place where a foaming stream rushed over the rocks, and into this he advanced fearlessly.

At one time a band of outlaws had made the place their rendezvous, a stout door having been placed across the entrance.

This door had been broken down, and was thought to have never been put up again, but to Dan's surprise he found it in place and apparently securely fastened from within.

This satisfied him that the man he wanted, or some other fugitive from justice, had taken up his abode there, and he was more pleased than if he had found the place in its former condition.

There were fresh foot-prints in the soft earth and upon the moss-grown rocks, and this circumstance was a further confirmation of his suspicions.

The door could not be secured from the outside, and as he could not force it open he was confident that his man was upon the other side of it.

With the butt of his revolver he rapped upon the door several times, and then called out loudly:

"Open in the name of the law!"

"Go to —," was the gruff response from within.

"If one Jeff Rhodes, so-called, is within, I have a warrant for his arrest, and I give warning that if he does not surrender himself, I shall take extreme measures."

"Go to blazes. Jeff Rhodes, so-called, is here, and is going to stay. If you want me, let me see you get me. Who the mischief are you, anyhow?"

"Denver Dan, sheriff."

"The deuce, Jeff, he'll nab us sure as fate," was the whispered response to this announcement.

"So there are two of them," said Dan to himself. "I thought the first voice was unlike the second. Well, two are no worse than one."

Pausing a moment, he again rapped on the door, and then said:

"Are you coming out?"

"No."

"Then I'm going to burn you out! Get a lot of stuff, boys, and pile it around the door."

Those inside did not know that Dan was alone, and therefore this order, given his supposed comrades, caused them considerable consternation. Jeff's companion wanted him to open the door, but the latter utterly refused to do any such thing, and swore to have Dan's life if he dared to enter.

Dan gathered a large quantity of brush, dead wood, and dry moss, placing it before the door and then setting fire to it, after which he brought logs and branches, piling them upon the fire, and then standing back to watch the effect.

The door soon caught fire, the planks of which it was composed being dry and tinder-like, so that in a few moments it was all ablaze, the heat being intense.

"Will you come out?" said Dan again, as he saw the boards warp and begin to start from their places.

"No!"

Then he piled the entrance high with brush and dry wood, setting it on fire and remaining outside in the cooler air.

The flames hissed and snapped and roared, until at last the heavy door fell in with a crash, and the smoke poured in a dense volume into the cave, nearly suffocating the inmates.

A lot of green wood was then thrown upon the heap by the relentless Dan, the smoke arising therefrom being very thick and suffocating.

"Hallo, hallo! quit that and I will come out," said Jeff's associate.

"You've got to wait till the fire burns out now," responded Dan, coolly. "You should have come out at first."

A shower of bullets was the answer to this remark, but Dan was unhurt, and he tauntingly replied:

"Keep it up, if you like; I've got a regular arsenal out here, and I can fire away at you all night when I once get started."

The fire still blazed brightly—the choking smoke arising in great clouds and filling the cave in all parts, thence rising from the gulley to the air above.

"Put out your confounded fire," said the man who was inclined to surrender. "Do you want to smother us with your blasted smoke?"

"I'm not particular either way."

"Put it out, and I'll give in."

"Shut your mouth!" snarled Jeff. "I'm going to make a dash for it. I don't believe there's any one out there but Denver Dan, blast him! and I'm a match for him, I reckon!"

He did make a dash for it and discharged the last chambers of his revolver, one bullet penetrating the crown of Dan's hat.

The fiery bed of hot coals was too much for him, however, and he retreated after having taken three or four steps beyond the door.

The other man was not going to stay there to be smothered and he made a run for it, bursting through the red

hot embers and falling exhausted upon the ground, his clothes on fire in several places.

Dan seized him and rolled him over into the stream, where the fire was extinguished.

Our hero then permitted him to scramble to his feet, and as he seemed utterly crestfallen, said:

"Behave yourself and I will treat you decently, but cut up rough and it will be the worse for you."

"I'll do anything you say. I don't want to be roasted or smothered."

"Dash water on the fire from the stream. Splash it up with your hands; you know how I mean."

The man stood in the bed of the stream and dashed the water in sheets upon the fire, making considerable more smoke, but eventually putting it out.

"Now, Mr. Jeff, are you coming out or not?" said Dan.

"Go to the devil."

"He's used all his cartridges up," said the other man, "and you can just go in there and haul him out."

Dan advanced to the spot where the door had been and called out:

"See here, my man, I know this cave well, and its exact size and shape. I've a repeating rifle with me here, and I'm going to begin a regular fusillade upon you from one end of the cave to the other, so that I shall be sure to hit you before my cartridges give out."

"Hold on, Dan, you wouldn't hit a fellow when he's down, would ye? I thought better of ye than that."

"No-man can say I ever took an unfair advantage of any one. You're dead game, Jeff, and no mistake. It's a pity your weren't an honest man."

"Will you treat me square if I come out?"

"I'll take you to jail, that's all I can do."

"You won't shoot me?"

"No, indeed."

"You shot Red."

"That was unavoidable."

"But one of your gang shot Tom."

"That could not be helped."

"I suppose not. Can you help shooting me if I come out?"

"Yes."

"Will you gimme a fair trial in court and let me say what I like?"

"Yes."

"Then I crawl."

"Come out then."

The man came out, but it was not Jeff, though closely resembling that malefactor.

"What's this?" said Dan. "You are not Jeff Rhodes!"

"I know I ain't, but that's all right. I'm Jeff's brother, and while you've been dallyin' here, Jeff has been makin' tracks for Texas, just as fast as ever he kin."

Dan saw that he had been foiled, though he showed no signs of annoyance, and sternly ordered the two men to go before him up to the top of the gulch.

CHAPTER XVI.

VICTORY FOR THE CHUMS—CONCLUSION.

WHILE Dan had been occupied with the two outlaws in the Devil's Gulch, as related in the preceding chapter, Jack Travis was by no means idle.

He thought that it might be just as well to look for the game in two places at once as to take them separately, and consequently, while Dan was on his way to the gulch, he was hurrying toward Paddy Riley's.

Hal and Martin were along, though they kept a little in the rear of Jack as a sort of reserve force, to be brought to the front if necessary.

When Jack arrived at the establishment of Ri Lee, the wife of that slippery individual informed him that the aforesaid gentleman was out.

"Then I'll wait," said Jack, taking a seat.

Mrs. Riley was curious, not to say suspicious.

"What might ye be afther wantin' to see him about?" she asked.

"Business."

"Is it washin'? Sure, I can attind to that."

No, it was not washing.

"Maybe ye've come afther the rint, afore it's half due. That blaggard of a landlord wud loike us to pay six months advance, I belave, upon me sowl."

But he had not come after the rent.

"Is it the taxes, thin?"

No, it was not the taxes.

"Or the water rates?"

No.

"Oh, begorrah, I have it. Yez want to take the sinsis av the place. Phy, I kin give ye that as well as Mr. Riley." But he had not come to get the census.

Mrs. Riley was obliged at last to ask a direct question.

"Thin what in the name of common sinse have ye come afther?"

"I'll tell Mr. Riley when he comes."

"An' you won't tell me?"

"No."

"D'ye think Paddy Riley has any saycret from his woife? Begorra, if he kapes back anything from me, I'll pull ivery hair out av his head!"

"I can't help that."

"And ye think that he wouldn't tell me what ye came fur?"

"He can if he likes."

"He will, too. What d'ye want him for, anyhow?"

"Business."

"What kind?"

"Are you Mr. Riley?"

"Sure, can't ye see I ain't?"

"Then I don't want to see you. Go back to your wash-tub."

"Wash-tub, is it?" screamed the irate wife of Ri Lee.

"Begorra, I'd have ye know I'm a lady, and don't have nothin' to do wid wash-tubs, bad luck to yer dirty face!"

She said much more than this, but seeing that it had no effect upon Jack, and that he listened imperturbably to it all, she desisted, after having wrought herself up to a high pitch of excitement and grown very red in the face.

Then she retired in great dudgeon, banging all the doors that she could find to bang, boxing the ears of all the children, and scolding every one of the laundresses a dozen times.

Hal and Martin, posted outside, had kept a careful watch upon the house, so that if any one hidden within had taken alarm at Jack's visit and attempted to escape, they would have been detected at once.

After the indignant Mrs. Riley had been gone about ten minutes, the man of the house himself appeared.

"Patrick Riley?" said Jack, interrogatively, as the man entered, not habited as a Chinaman, but in his own costume, the Chinese garb having been abolished after a good trade had been established.

"Yis, sir; what d'ye want wid me?"

"I have a warrant for your arrest!"

Riley's face turned pale, and his knees shook beneath him.

"What for?"

"Harboring a criminal—one Jeff Rhodes, train-robber."

"Is that all?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I tell ye where he is, will it be all roight?"

"If he is not in the house."

"Well, thin, he isn't. He's an the thrain bound for 'Frisco as fast as he can thtravel."

"Now, look here, Paddy Riley, I'll put Mike Halcraft upon your track if you don't tell me the truth."

"Sure it's niver a word of lie I'm tellin' ye, Misther Jack. I pit him on the thrain myself."

"We'll have to search your house."

"Begorra, ye won't!"

Jack gave a whistle, and Hal and Martin entered.

"Search the house!"

"Upon me wurrud, Misther Jack, he's not in it."

"Will you take your oath?"

"Yis."

"What did you make such a fuss about it then for?"

"Arrah, don't I know that me house isn't good enough for foine gintlemen like yez to go through."

"Stow your blarney, Paddy, we don't want it. Hal, stay here until I go to the telegraph office."

He was off like a shot, and telegraphed all along the road that Jeff was on the way, and for the officers to look out for him.

Riley gave up when he saw that Jack was so determined, for he had wanted to detain him on some pretext or other, and he admitted that Jeff had started for San Francisco that morning.

Jeff was arrested before he had left Colorado, and was sent back to Denver, where he was put on trial and sent to prison for a long term.

There was nothing further to be done against the train-robbers now, the whole band having been broken up, the feat being another feather in our hero's cap.

Having seen them all safely through their adventures with this set of desperadoes, we will, for the present, take leave of our old friends, DENVER DAN AND HIS CHUMS.

[THE END.]

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